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Emerging Technologies in Distance Education

Chapter One Summary

ITC 435

In the first chapter of his book, *Emerging Technologies in Distance Education*, George Veletsianos attempts to define the term “emerging technologies.” Believe it or not, simply defining this term was no easy task. In 2008, when Mr. Veletsianos received permission to move forward with this text, there wasn’t a definition of emerging technologies that was generally accepted. Perplexed by the fact that this frequently used phrase existed without a commonly accepted definition, George turned to his colleagues for assistance. Many of the individuals that Mr. Veletsianos interacted with over the issue of defining emerging technologies have contributed to his book.

George did eventually discover a definition for emerging technologies as it relates to education. This definition was made available through a report for the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training. It states that a technology is considered to be emerging if it is not yet a must-have, such as email. Veletsianos disagreed with the appropriateness of this definition since it technically identifies all technologies currently not in educational use to be considered emerging technologies. George Veletsianos argues that some technologies not currently used in education may be emerging, but it is false to identify all of them as emerging. He supports his argument by pointing out how technologies are explored and utilized before they are considered to be “must-haves.” Veletsianos also points out that incorporating use of a technology just because others have labeled it as a must-have is undesirable since it suggests that educational organizations merely follow the tendencies of others, thus ignoring the possibilities of the technology for educational purposes. George stresses that the components of one’s current educational situation also have an impact on which technologies can or cannot be classified as emerging.

George Veletsianos also references the Horizon Reports in his publication to demonstrate how the definition of “emerging technologies” fluctuates from 2004 to 2008. George illustrates three important points in reference to this report. The first is how the report consistently indicates that emerging technologies will “likely have impacts on teaching, learning, or creative expression over the next one to five years” (pg. 28). He also points out the fact that from 2004 to 2007, these reports focus on the use of emerging technologies in higher education. The specification of higher education is broadened to general learning institutions in 2008. Finally,

Veletsianos calls our attention to the fact that the degree to which these emerging technologies may impact the educational field tends to change year to year. In 2004, technologies are expected to be, “very important,” while in 2005, are expected to become, “increasingly significant.” The 2006 report states that technologies, “will significantly impact,” while in 2007 revert to, “will impact.” The 2008 report simply states that emerging technologies will, “enter into mainstream use.” Veletsianos claims that the differences in these definitions suggest how there is a vagueness as to how these technologies will impact learning and what the measure of that impact could be. George states that this uncertainty is an important component of emerging technologies.

After a great deal of research, Veletsianos offers a comprehensive definition of emerging technologies. He identifies emerging technologies as innovations, tools, hardware and software, concepts, ideas, and knowledge. George states that they are engaging, influential and transformative, not well understood, and threaten the status quo. According to Veletsianos, emerging technologies afford creativity, are solutions waiting for problems, promote connection and collaboration, and are potentially significant. He states that emerging technologies are used to improve learning, instruction, social processes, and interconnectedness. Veletsianos also goes on to explain that just because a technology is new, does not mean it is emerging. Vice versa, Mr. Veletsianos advocates that just because a technology is emerging, doesn’t suggest that it is new. He proposes that “emerging technologies are evolving organisms that exist in a state of coming into being” (pg. 35). In other words, these technologies undergo various changes as they develop and grow. Throughout the course of their development, emerging technologies experience upward and downward trends in popularity. Veletsianos also states that emerging technologies are not yet fully understood, nor are they fully researched (pg. 37-38). George states that emerging technologies are different from other technologies because we’re not quite sure how to best make use of them. Due to the changing natures of these technologies, they aren’t typically subject to formal research and as Veletsianos points out, newer technologies are being utilized in older and more familiar ways. Finally, Veletsianos embellishes the fact that emerging technologies may maintain great potential, yet their potential remains mostly unfulfilled.

An accepted definition of emerging technologies can allow individuals to have conversations, share ideas on research, and provide support for emerging technologies. Veletsianos stated that initially, the definition of emerging technologies was intended to be included in a short introduction to his book. However, since the process of defining this term lead to such critical realizations of emerging technologies, it earned itself a chapter all to itself. As George Veletsianos states, “This definition provides a starting point from which our work can be conceptualized, extended, and evaluated” (pg.43).

References:

Veletsianos, G. (2010). *Emerging Technologies in Distance Education* (21- 44). Edmonton, AB: AU Press, Athabasca University.